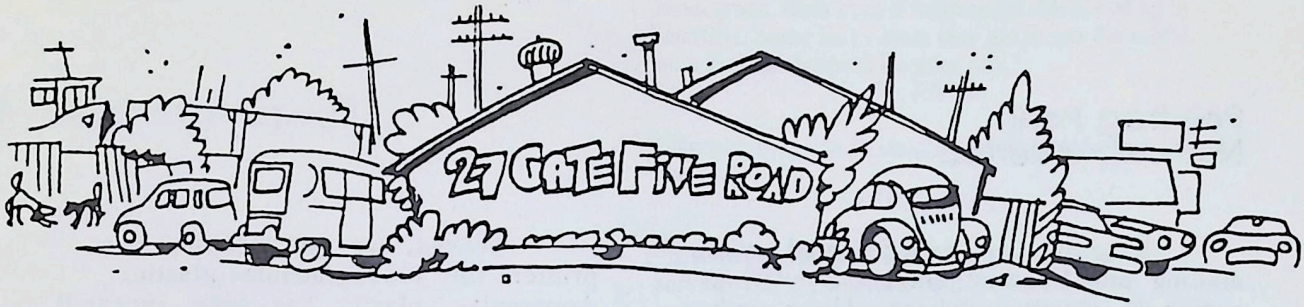


April, 1988 No. 7

Contract Signed for CD ROM Version of Essential Whole Earth Catalog

From our history-as-confirmed-rumor department: yes, we have signed a contract with a software publisher for a CD ROM version of the *Essential Whole Earth Catalog*. Now, we can't tell you just yet who this publisher is or what exactly we will be calling the new electronic version., or how much it will cost. But reliable sources close to Whole Earth told this reporter that the CD disc will be available when the post Labor Day marketing window opens in early September.

Meanwhile, the mail bags are arriving with responses to Jonathan E.'s requests for updated access information. Naturally, many folks are trying to slip whole new products into the book as well, some of which will indeed be included. The frenzied activity of shoving the *Catalog* off the printed page and onto a disc (yes, in CD-land disc is spelled with a "c" rather than an "k") is taking place in our newly rented electronic sweatshop here on the Whole Earth campus. Oh dear, we're even beginning to talk like them...

Personal Service Is Almost Here

With every passing day here, two things happen. First, we are reminded yet again of problems readers are having with their subscriptions. Second, we inch closer to moving our subscription fulfillment service in-house and eliminating much stress and irritation for our readers and ourselves.

Paul Davis, resident fulfillment czar, flew recently to Washington DC for an all day training program hosted by MacSUB, our Macintosh-based fulfillment software. Paul reports he found people there conscientious and competent, thus bolstering our hopes that this might actually work out the way we originally hoped.

Right now, we're waiting for the data on our 20,000 plus subscribers to be translated into a form that the new software can digest. Meanwhile we're running tests on small amounts of data and gearing up for the conversion. We expect to go online by the end of May, if our luck holds.

Polybag Peril Narrowly Averted

Recently we experimented with mailing our US first class and overseas copies in plastic polybags. Along with the magazine we sent an outsert asking readers your opinion about whether the magazines arrived in better shape as a result of the plastic polybags, and asking whether or not you thought it was a good idea.

The results are reported in full below. Without a doubt, the magazines arrived in better shape for a significant number of readers. Interestingly enough, there was no strong correlation between those whose magazines arrived in better condition and those who thought using plastic is a good idea. In other words, people are more concerned about plastic litter with a 300 year life span than with getting their magazines in pristine condition. The global vision of plastic waste that emerged was quite sobering: plastic blowing across the plains of Alberta, plastic blowing down the streets of Jakarta, plastic drifting silently on the bottom of Monterey Bay.

What are we doing about it? First, we are having custom envelopes made that will fit the magazine more exactly, and which are made of heavier paper. We hope that this new combination of size and weight will make the envelopes protect the magazine better. (Please let us know about yours.)

Second, we are lobbying our printer for biodegradable plastic. Apparently, plastic has been invented using corn polymers which make the plastic biodegradable. (See the October 5, 1987 edition of *Forbes* magazine for an interesting article on this subject). But this plastic is not commercially available yet. National Geographic and others are pushing hard for it, and with perhaps soon we'll see some results. *Mother Jones* and *Audobon* are using a "non-toxic polyethylene" that does not produce chlorine compounds when incinerated, but still doesn't degrade when buried. That's a pretty weak half-measure, and one that we don't find acceptable.

The survey also uncovered some interesting aspects to the debate which are presented here in abridged form. Our thanks to the many readers who responded to our request for feedback.

P.S. We were hoping also to audit delivery times and find out how long it takes the magazine to get to you and what we might do to shorten it, but due to delays between the printer and post office this information is not valid. Sigh. Maybe next time.

POLYBAG MAILING RESPONSE SUMMARY										
4/25/88				CONDITION OF MAGAZINE			OPINION OF READERS			
				UPON ARRIVAL						% Don't Care/
REGION	# Sent	#Response	% Response	% Better	% Same	% Worse	% Good Idea	% Bad IDea	Don't Know	
USA	485	47	10%	38%	60%	2%	38%	36%	26%	
Canada	725	96	13%	46%	47%	7%	44%	34%	22%	
Overseas	1000	38	4%	42%	47%	11%	45%	26%	29%	
TOTALS	2210	181	8%	43%	50%	7%	43%	33%	24%	

Our Readers Respond...

""I don't know what sort of paper envelopes you've been using, but they almost certainly have undesirable chemicals in the fabric, the glue and the ink. Not to mention the effects of the industries that make them. Anyone who's fussy enough to worry unduly about this has no business supporting the magazine, full of horrible chemicals that it is!"
-- *SL, New Zealand*

"It shows the customs people what's inside. AS long as the cover is presentable, I'll get it. Other mags in brown paper sometimes do not reach me."
-- *WF, Thailand*

"It's wonderful to have people of a divided mind in our ruthless world." --*RB, Switzerland*

"February 24th the Winter Issue arrived much battered. I was about to send you an obscene FAX but couldn't find your number. And today, right on time came your Spring Issue. Hooray. But how about biodegradable plastic?" -- *MK, England*

"Although our people are fairly public-spirited, recently it's sometimes hard to control the curiosity of some mailmen when he carries an airmail from overseas in a significant paper envelope. This time, however, it was safe because the packing was transparent." -- *AU, Japan*

"An intact- nay, pristine - WER in a polybag as opposed to an already degrading issue in paper annihilates your reservations. I shall reduce my consumption of cling film or similar by TEN times the polybag to make amends." -- *NW, England*

""Good PR for WER because the package impressed the rural delivery person" -- *AM, Canada*

"Symbolically, it sends a mixed message, such as "It's OK to talk about this stuff but really it's too hard to do it. Please return to paper."
-- *BE, Canada*

"I ride a horse and am out on the bald prairies a lot. It always amazes me how much plastic crap is blowing around, hanging up in the weeds and fences and NOT going away. Thanks for caring about my opinion."
-- *AB, Canada*

"I don't know which is worse, cutting down trees or plopping plastic in a landfill. Y'all decide."
-*EH, Oregon*

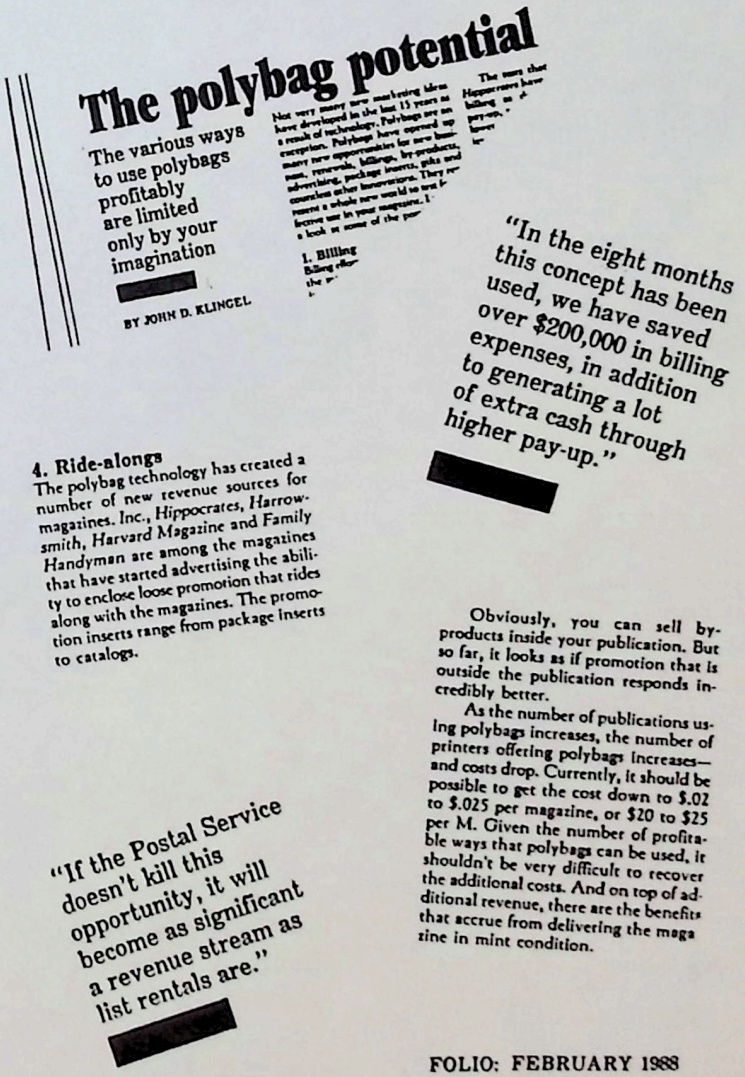
"Use plastic and you'll save a tree. Use paper and it'll biodegrade. Both burn if incinerated. Most end up in landfills. Some lucky ones may get to see the world on a garbage barge. Life goes on..."
-- *RS, Illinois*

"The polybags can be chopped up and used as garden mulch."
--*RD, New Jersey*

"If Whole Earth saves money and provides better service with plastic, then your product will be improved with plastic. Viva plastic!"
-- *DB, New Jersey*

""I use ziploc bags every chance I get, so how can I fault your use? SO even though I expect WER to be above others in the matter of environmental concerns it would be hypocritical of me to disapprove. Big points to WER for even asking what we think."
--*JG, California*

And So Do The Captains of Industry:



The polybag potential

The various ways to use polybags profitably are limited only by your imagination

BY JOHN D. KLINGEL

Not very many new marketing ideas have developed in the last 15 years as a result of technology. Polybags are an exception. Polybags have opened up many new opportunities for new business, rewards, billings, by products, advertising, package inserts, gifts and countless other innovations. They represent a whole new world to see in better use in your magazine. Let's take a look at some of the possibilities.

1. Billing
Billing offers the ...

4. Ride-alongs
The polybag technology has created a number of new revenue sources for magazines. Inc., Hippocrates, Harrowsmith, Harvard Magazine and Family Handyman are among the magazines that have started advertising the ability to enclose loose promotion that rides along with the magazines. The promotion inserts range from package inserts to catalogs.

Obviously, you can sell by-products inside your publication. But so far, it looks as if promotion that is outside the publication responds incredibly better.

As the number of publications using polybags increases, the number of printers offering polybags increases—and costs drop. Currently, it should be possible to get the cost down to $.02 to $.025 per magazine, or $20 to $25 per M. Given the number of profitable ways that polybags can be used, it shouldn't be very difficult to recover the additional costs. And on top of additional revenue, there are the benefits that accrue from delivering the magazine in mint condition.

"In the eight months this concept has been used, we have saved over $200,000 in billing expenses, in addition to generating a lot of extra cash through higher pay-up."

"If the Postal Service doesn't kill this opportunity, it will become as significant a revenue stream as list rentals are."

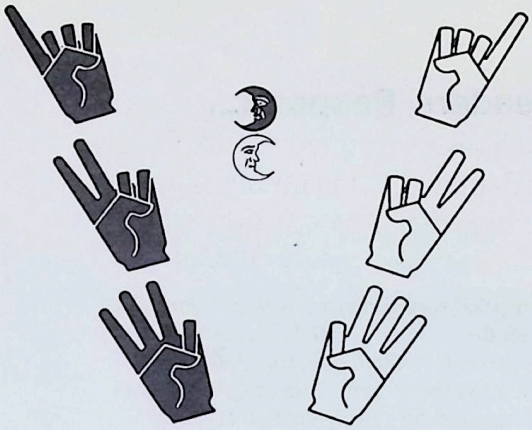
New Volleyball Soft Technology Discovered

The Western Bioregion League season is off to a flying start. The big development in the league this year has been the improvement of playing stadium here in Sausalito. It is widely believed that League management, drawing a lesson from the dismal situation that has developed with the San Francisco Giants and Candlestick Park (Giants will be leaving SF due to failure to upgrade the ballpark), made the move in order to ensure that the League will retain its top players in Sausalito.

A major ball retrieval upgrade was completed after the necessary extensive engineering blueprints and environmental impact reports were filed. The League contracted the illustrious J. Baldwin to build a vertical ascent/descent device (blueprints available from JB) to allow players to access the top of the storage container adjacent to the court where stray balls often deposit themselves. The need for such a device was accentuated by the recent acquisition of Richard "Boom-Boom" Kadrey, whose power shots have been found up to hundreds of yards from the court.

The current California drought gave impetus to the development of our new hydraulic fine particulate matter control system (read: garden hose). That and the addition of feline feces control patrols have contributed to a fine Spring season.

46 Injury-Free Playing Days
This Season



Ryan Returns to Reorganize Research Regimen

Susan Erkel Ryan, whose retirement was prematurely announced last issue, has returned to Whole Earth to organize the production of our two new books, *Signal* and *Fringes of Reason*. Our deepest apologies to our readers, who were shocked and saddened at last issue's announcement. Thanks to all of you who contributed to the Bring Her Back Alive Fund.

This issue brought to you by Richard Schauffler, who hopes that it finds you in good spirits. All Rights Forfeited.

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